

Practical guide to rearing lambs



This guide will assist you with the basics of rearing a lamb to ensure they have the best start. If you have any concerns about the health of your lamb, please contact your local veterinarian.

Produced by the Ministry for Primary Industries with support from:

Ministry for Primary Industries
Manatū Ahu Matua



SPRING SHEEP
— MILK CO. —
New Zealand

Maui
— SHEEP MILK —



NZVA
New Zealand Veterinary Association



Your legal obligations

Animal Welfare Act 1999

Your animals are your responsibility, and you need to plan for them accordingly. Under the Animal Welfare Act 1999, you must provide your animals with:

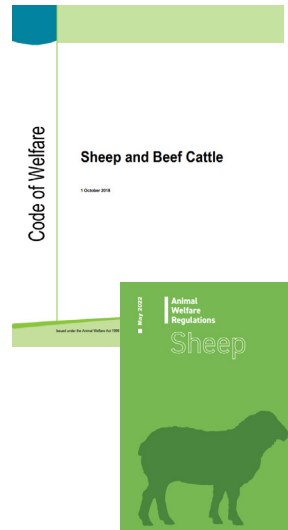
- proper and sufficient food and water
- adequate shelter
- the opportunity to display normal patterns of behaviour
- appropriate physical handling



Your veterinarian or local rural supply store can help you get everything your lambs require and provide advice.

Codes of Welfare and Regulations

- Codes of welfare contain minimum standards and recommendations for best practice for different animals in different situations.
- Failure to meet a minimum standard in a code of welfare is not directly enforceable but can be used as evidence to support a prosecution for an offence under the Act.
- The recommended best practices shown in the codes set out standards of care and conduct, over and above the minimum required to meet the obligations of the Act.
- All codes of welfare are publicly available on the MPI website www.mpi.govt.nz/animals/animal-welfare/codes/all-animal-welfare-codes
- Regulations set out mandatory and enforceable animal welfare standards on matters such as animal care and procedures performed on animals. Please see the MPI website for more details: www.mpi.govt.nz/animals/animal-welfare/regulations



Best practice guidelines

It is important that a new born lamb receives at least 2 days of colostrum (first milk from the ewe). Colostrum is very important as it provides protection from diseases. A healthy lamb ready to be hand reared should be lively and alert with clear bright eyes and should have a small dry navel.

Facilities

When rearing lambs, it's important to provide them with warm, clean, dry & draught-free environment. Here are some things to consider for ensuring lambs have the most comfortable start.

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Housing | The rearing shed should be closed in on 3 sides and face away from the prevailing wind. Good ventilation is essential. |
| Bedding | Straw, shavings or sawdust. |
| Water | Clean drinking water should be available at all times. |
| Ad lib fibre | Straw or hay should be available from the first day. |
| Meal | Lambs should have access to meal from the first day. There must be enough room to allow all lambs to access the meal feeder. 30cm per lamb of feeding space is recommended for lambs after weaning. |
| Space | If rearing multiple lambs, a group size of 10-12 lambs is recommended and 0.5m ² of space is required per lamb. Solid partitions between lamb pens are recommended. If there is room place a hay bale in the pen for the lambs to rest against. |
| Warmth | Wool covers can be used for small or unwell lambs. |
| Access to the outdoors | When the weather allows, lambs will enjoy access to pasture. Giving them the freedom to choose between pasture and their indoor pen is ideal. |

If you are keeping your lamb inside your house, then careful attention to hygiene is very important. Hands should be washed after handling the lamb, and prompt cleaning of any soiling is necessary to protect the health of both children and adults.



Feeding

If possible, lambs should be provided with colostrum (first milk) from ewes within the first 24 hours of life. This will provide the lambs with protection from common infections for up to 3 months. If colostrum from ewes is not available then a commercial colostrum replacer should be fed.

Milk powder

Use lamb milk powders as these are specifically formulated to meet the needs of lambs. Milk powders with a casein content of 20% are recommended. Mixing and feeding instructions are provided on the bag and should be followed closely. Once milk is made up it should be stored in a refrigerator. This can be fed direct from the fridge or if your lamb is very small leave the milk on the bench for 15 minutes prior to feeding. If feeding warm milk (no more than 37°C) then this should be yoghurtised. Avoid sudden changes in the type (brand), quantity or temperature of milk or milk powder, and thoroughly clean bottles/feeders and teats after each feed.

How much to feed your lamb

Lambs should be weighed once a week, and this can easily be done using bathroom scales. Weigh yourself, then pick up the lamb and weigh both yourself and the lamb. The difference is the weight of the lamb. The feeding rate is 15% of the lamb's weight. For example, a 5kg lamb needs to be fed a total of 750ml of milk per day spread out over at least 3 feeds.

| Age of lamb | Feeding Frequency |
|--------------|-------------------|
| 1-2 days | 6 feeds per day |
| 3-7 days | 4 feeds per day |
| 1-3 weeks | 3 feeds per day |
| 3-6 weeks | 2-3 feeds per day |
| Over 6 weeks | 1-2 feeds per day |



Do not allow lambs to 'guts out' and consume too much milk in one feed. A maximum volume of 350ml per feed is recommended. If you have multiple lambs of different ages, then you must feed each one according to its weight. If children are feeding lambs, then they must be supervised to ensure lambs are not overfed and that bottles are held in such a way that the lambs are drinking the milk rather than air sucking.

Meal

Nutritional value of meals can vary between products and formulations – use meals with a minimum protein content of 18%. Meal should be available from day 1. Keep it fresh and top it up twice a day.

Make sure that other animals such as dogs and horses cannot access any meal put out for lambs. Some lamb meals contain medications for the prevention of coccidiosis (a form of scours) that are toxic to other animals.

Recipe to make yoghurtised milk

Makes enough to feed 3 lambs for about 3 days or so.

1. Into the large bucket, add 1kg milk powder to 3L warm water and mix well (with a whisk or hand mixer) until powder has dissolved and no lumps are present.
2. Add 200ml plain unsweetened acidophilus yoghurt (available from your supermarket) and mix thoroughly.
3. Place the bucket, with the lid on, into your hot water cupboard and leave overnight or for 12+hours. Keeping the bucket warm and insulated will speed up the fermentation process. You might want to wrap a hot water bottle around the bucket and insulate it with towels.
4. After about 12 hours (this may take longer if bucket has cooled down), the milk should look and smell like yoghurt. If it doesn't look like yoghurt yet, leave for longer (consider adding a fresh hot water bottle to keep the contents warm).
5. Once the batch of milk has become yoghurt, remove 200ml from the bucket and keep in the fridge (clearly labelled so no one in the family eats it!) to use as the 'starter' to add to your next batch of milk.
6. To the large bucket, add cold water to bring the volume up to the 8L mark and mix thoroughly.
7. Your yoghurtised milk is now ready to be fed to your lambs at normal quantities.
8. Each batch of yoghurtised milk will last for 5 days in a cool place. Always check that it smells good (like yoghurt) and discard if it starts to smell 'off'.
9. Remember to make up a new batch 24 hours before you need it.

Weaning

Lambs can be weaned off milk when they are consuming 200gm/day of meal or when they weigh around 15-18kg, this is usually between 6-8 weeks of age. Do this by reducing both the volume of milk and number of feeds per day over a period of 1-2 weeks. Lambs will be very noisy and demanding during this time, so patience is required. Meal should be available for feeding ad lib for at least 3-4 weeks after the lambs are weaned off milk, and then they can be transitioned off meal onto pasture/forage diets. The consumption of meal will increase in conjunction with grass post weaning.

Suitable grass for lambs is pasture that is suitable for grazing adult stock. Lawns and gardens are unlikely to provide enough grass for lambs as they grow and if there is also access to gardens, they may consume plants that are poisonous. Note that lambs will also eat house plants which can be toxic, and fabric, such as clothes hung out to dry and cushions on outdoor furniture.

Health and Wellbeing

Contact your local veterinarian once you bring your lamb home. They will be able to provide you with advice to keep your lamb happy and healthy. Prevention is by far the best approach to health management in lambs as often once they get sick the chances of a full recovery are poor.

This NZVA link can be used to [find a vet](#).

Common health conditions to look out for

- Inflammation of the eyes caused by infection or eyelids turning under
- Naval infections, which if untreated can spread and cause more widespread infection such as joint infections.
- Mouth sores which can be painful and prevent feeding. One cause of these is scabby mouth which can also infect humans so washing hands after handling the lambs is very important especially for children.
- Pneumonia with lambs having a temperature, cough and shortness of breath. This may need treating with antibiotics and anti-inflammatories from a veterinarian.
- Foot scald where the skin between the claws becomes inflamed and can lead to an infection which will smell bad.
- Scours which can be caused by nutritional factors or infections. Careful feeding and keeping lamb feeding equipment and pens clean and hygienic will reduce the risk of scours.

Note that a number of infections and diseases of lambs can also affect people so personal hygiene is very important. Always wash hands after handling and cleaning up after lambs. Wear boots and overalls when handling lambs, clean these items regularly and take them off before entering living areas.

Abomasal Bloat

This is one of the most common causes of death in reared lambs. Even with prompt treatment the prospect for recovery is poor. Lambs will have a swollen belly and be dull and lethargic. Abdominal pain and teeth grinding, which is a sign of pain, are common. The onset can be rapid, within 30 minutes of feeding and sometimes lambs are found dead.

Common risk factors are:

- infrequent milk feeding
- overfeeding
- improper mixing of milk powder
- milk that is too hot
- feeding too rapidly
- poor hygiene



Urgent veterinary attention is essential so you should contact your veterinarian for advice as soon as you notice the lamb is bloated.

Wet, cold, floppy lambs

Lambs that are picked up after adverse weather or that have been rejected by their mothers, especially the smallest lamb of a set of triplets, are often cold, wet and lacking in energy so appear floppy. In addition to warming these lambs up carefully, they also need food to give them energy to warm up. In many cases these lambs have been rejected by their mothers because they are not well so a plan for their ongoing care should be discussed with your veterinarian.

Vaccination and drenching

All lambs need to be vaccinated to protect them from common diseases such as tetanus, other clostridial diseases and leptospirosis (a disease that people also get). Orphan lambs need to receive a vaccination with Lamb Vaccine. All lambs should get a 7 in 1 vaccine at 4 weeks of age. Seek veterinary advice for the best ongoing vaccination programme for your lamb.

Parasite management, for both internal and external parasites is dependent on the risk factors which can vary between farms and regions. Consult your veterinarian for advice and information about symptoms, risks and the most appropriate treatment or prevention options. Be wary of accepting some drench from a well-meaning friend as this may not be an effective treatment for your lambs. Lambs must always be weighed prior to drenching to ensure that the correct dose is given.

Planning for the future

As lambs grow into sheep, they will need ongoing health care. Adult sheep can live for more than 10 years. This care needs to include shearing and foot care as well as routine vaccinations, disease prevention measures (eg facial eczema) and drenching. Your veterinarian can help you make a plan to ensure your lambs and sheep remain healthy and comfortable for as long as they are on your property.



Tail docking and castration of lambs should be considered to make ongoing management easier. Both of these procedures are painful for the lamb. Getting your veterinarian to carry out these procedures means pain relief can be provided and is a great opportunity to get an overall health check for your lambs.



Sheep behaviour

Sheep are flock animals and are much happier if they have company of other sheep rather than being kept on their own. It is also worth noting that pet lambs grow into sheep with very little fear of people. This can make them dangerous to handle as they may charge or jump up at people. Care should be taken, and children should never be left unsupervised.

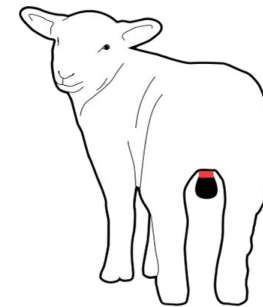
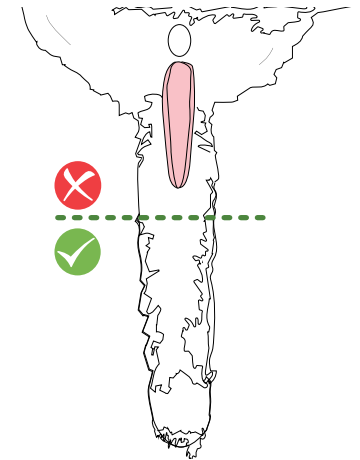
Homekill

If you are intending to rear your lambs to provide meat for your family you should contact a reputable homekill business to carry out the slaughter and dressing of your animals. It is important that this is done hygienically to ensure the meat is safe for your family to consume.

Castration and Tail Docking

Castration and tail docking are painful procedures and careful consideration should be given when deciding whether these are appropriate for your situation. Castration may be carried out when there are significant advantages to farm management e.g. managing aggression and preventing breeding. Docking of tails is carried out for a variety of animal health and management reasons including to prevent faecal soiling, dag formation, flystrike, and to make dagging, crutching and shearing easier and safer to perform.

- When tail docking lambs under six months old, a rubber ring or hot iron must be used. Don't dock any shorter than the distal end of the caudal fold - this is the point where the two folds of skin attach on the underside of the tail. Aim to leave enough tail so that it covers the vulva in ewes and a similar length in rams. Sheep over six months old can only be tail-docked by a veterinarian using pain relief.



- Castration is painful at any age and pain relief is always recommended. You must use pain relief when castrating sheep over six months old, or if using a high tension band at any age. Use of rubber rings is the preferred method.



Tips for Agricultural Days

Your child should feed the lamb whenever possible, noting the need for adult supervision. Lambs fed by parents usually do not perform well on Agricultural (Ag) Day. Build a bond with the lamb by walking it on a lead, playing with it, and practice calling the lamb before each feed so that it learns to come when called. Remember to reward the lamb with a treat such as a few pellets or by giving it a pat, hug and a few kind words.

The lamb should only wear a collar while supervised. The sizing of the collar needs to be regularly checked as the lamb grows otherwise the collar will become too tight.



For more information

[Sheep Regulations Leaflet](#)

[AgResearch Lamb Rearing Guide](#)

[Farmlands Guide](#)

Check the codes of welfare and regulations:

www.mpi.govt.nz/welfarecodes

www.mpi.govt.nz/animalregs

Contact MPI

Call: 0800 00 83 33

Email: animalwelfare@mpi.govt.nz

Visit: www.mpi.govt.nz

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